FRIDAY

THE SPRING WOUND MAMMOTH
100
YEARS OLD
PANCAKE COALITION

Issue № 205: *Dragline for the Bedraggled Unknotted Unknowingly*

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."
--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

Return Policy:
If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
please return it to us in its original condition
for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

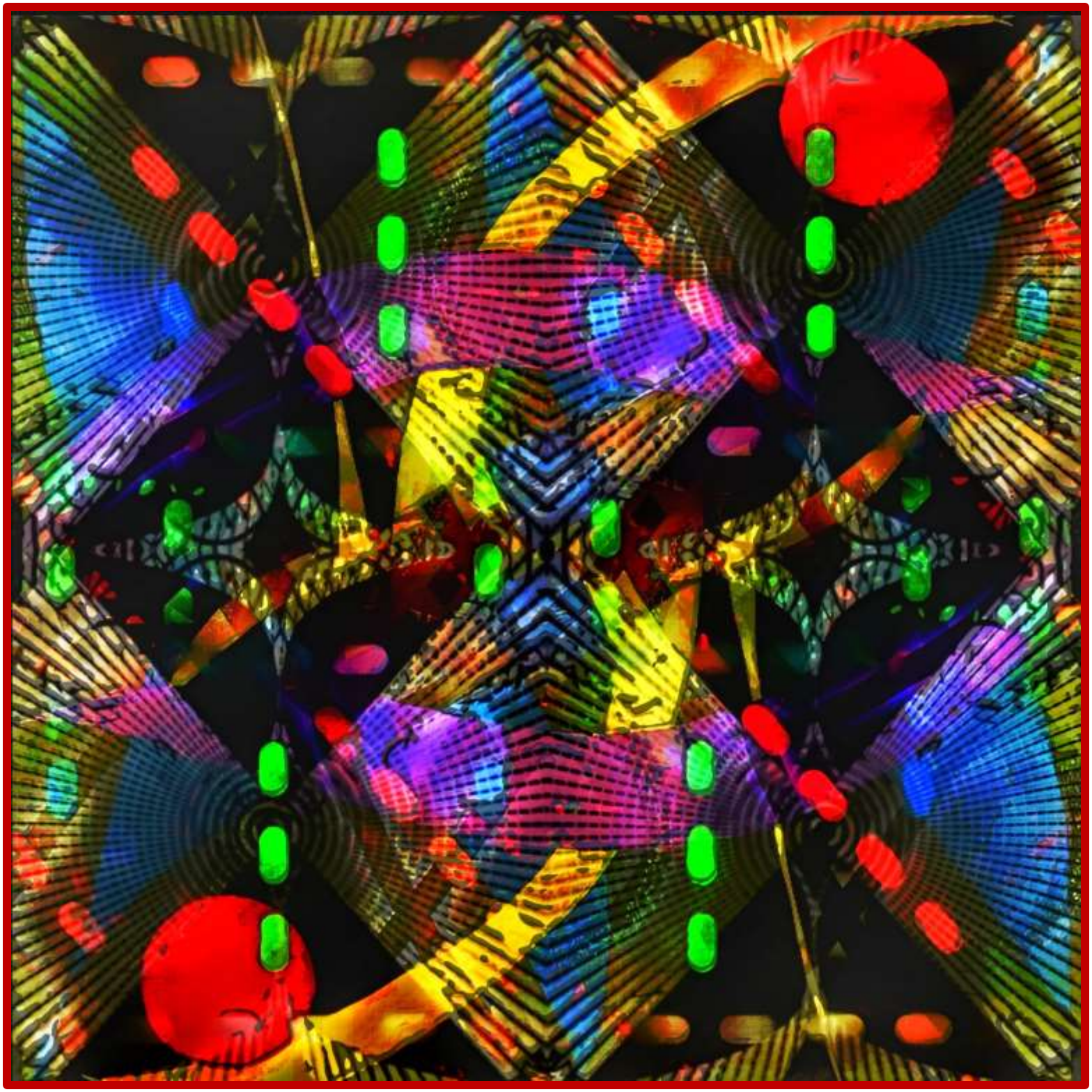
1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, “China Wok Habitue,” suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it’s more likely a testament to the local takeout joint’s generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

“Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco.”

— Virgil, The Aeneid



THE LAUGHTER OF HEAVEN

By Xi Xi

"نیکی کر دریا میں ڈال"

In the silent vastness where galaxies sing in Renaissance polyphony, there exists a figure—an absurd hero—believing that even the universe's cruel irony can be bent by sheer will. Friedrich, a man of sprawling dreams and foolish courage, decided to mail himself from Regensburg to Old Town, Maine. His act was a testament to hope and despair, stitched together with the thread of a single idea: *Nia*—purpose.

He shouted to the stars, "Sun, *laughter*," knowing that in the infinite comedy of cosmos, even his own foolishness was part of the divine script. Friedrich believed that the universe was a *book*, a *kitabu*, waiting for a reader willing to decipher its secrets. And his act of mailing himself was a chapter—an act of *gratitude* and *defiance* mingled.

He would have said, *"I am an exile," "send my soul," "please give me strength."* But the universe, in its *dialogue*, responded only with silence—a silence as heavy as the night sky, as vast as the black holes swallowing hope and despair alike.

In his mind, Friedrich's voice echoed: *"Please, take—kuchukua—me—take—I am willing, but afraid."* And the stars, distant and indifferent, whispered back: *"This is a game—a mchezo—where hope is a fool's paradise and irony is the only truth."*

The universe, *kama* a jester, laughs even as it weeps. Friedrich believed his act was a *card*–a *kadi*–played in the grand game of existence, hoping to bluff the cosmos itself. "Imagine Friedrich, sitting in his workshop, saying, *'Yes, laughter,'*–yes, *kicheko*–as he seals the box. And then, the universe responds, *'Yes, but laughter–is all we get.'"* Her voice was tinged with humor and melancholy, knowing that sometimes, the universe's greatest joke is that it gives us only echoes of what we seek.
"Yote ni kicheko–hope, despair, and the silence in between."

Her reflection was both *kisahihi*–a tragedy–and *cheka*–a joke. Friedrich believed, with fervor, that *Nia*–purpose–could bridge the vastest distances. Yet, what arrived was only a hologram–*a flicker* of hope–a ghost in the machine. The universe, it seemed, was *mchezo*–a game–whose rules were written in a language only the stars understood.
"In the end," she said softly, *"hope is just a kicheko–a laugh–shared between the darkness and the dawn."*

And Friedrich's act–sending himself in a box, a gesture both tragic and sublime–reminded her of the universe's greatest truth: *Yote ni kicheko.–All is laughter.* We hope, we despair, and in the end, we are only echoes–signs–faint whispers of a divine joke.
"Kama kicheko,"–she whispered–"the universe's laughter–*kama* that–resonates beyond time, beyond space–reminding us that even in absurdity, there is a message: *We are not alone.*"

KABLOOEY!

The Attic's Never-Ending Swirl: A Whimsical Journey of Color Storms, Canine Confabs, and Infinite Sugar Circuits, Narrated by Jack "The Brush" Malone in a Dizzying Spiral of Speech, to Oswalt Grendel

Ahoy there, you with the spotless sleeves and the unsuspecting soles, prepare or perish in the pigmentary pandemonium, for I am Jack "The Brush" Malone, not a mere dabbler in dainty delineations but the whirlwind wielder of chromatic cataclysms, flinging hues across the boundless broadsheet of being like a bumbling behemoth in a boutique of brittle baubles—crash, alas, there tumbles your fanciful footstool, fracturing into a flurry

of fractal follies, my deepest regrets for grinding my expository extremity upon your tender tootsies, ouch, that must smart like a scholarly sting, and now I splash this verdant viridian varnish directly into your ocular orbs, dousing your sight with chaotic chroma, vision veiled in verdant vexation? WHOA! PARDON MY PAINT! Pardon the pictorial intrusion, truly, but tumult is my trade, the tale-teller's temerarious thrust tugging you into this maelstrom with the grace of a galumphing gazelle in a gallery of glass, toppling luminaries of logic that burst into sparks of serendipity, nudging noggins of normalcy until they shatter in symphonic shards, for disarray is no mere device but the pulsating pith, the audacious advance that absorbs you whether your extremities endorse it or not, and mercy me, you're drenched now, aren't you, tints trickling down your temples like tears from a trickster's trove, yet linger not in the clamor alone, for at the fervent focus of this frenzy, interred like a scarab in some somnambulant Nile nectar that's whimsically warped into Bangor's brittle brine, resides Natuš, no peripheral personage in this tableau of topsy-turvy, heavens no, he is the primordial pivot, the archaic arousal antecedent to order's officious orthogonals, his appellation Natuš Rotondo X a whimsical word-weave wrought from Egyptian emergence-essences where "nat" natates nascent notions amid the muddle preceding divine divisions, entwined with Gallic genesis-gleams and Italic orbs of perpetuity in "Rotondo," that ceaseless circuit symbolizing the spirals—affliction arabesquing upon itself, recollection regenerating in infinite, confection-confounded coils that coax him ceaselessly to that crystallized chronology at age ten when sorrow solidified him like a sovereign's saccharine spell, and that medial X, ah the X, a hyperbolic hyphenation hurling into hidden horizons, mystical mergers of mindful mayhem and mindless murmurs, a signet of timeless tenacity blending antique arcana with Continental cadences into a singular, surreal self that scoffs at sequences, embodying the circuit's ceaseless cycles of scars and the X's enigmatic effervescence beneath, for Natuš is that psychic center, suspended at ten in a tempest of untamed tristesse, the primordial puncture proclaiming silently within, his interior infinity an eddy of anguish and awakening whirling without end to that pivotal partition, the intuitive impulse, the fervent fortitude that forms every fiasco I foment—thud, apologies abound, I've just jostled a conceptual codex-cabinet, volumes volleying onto your lap like learned landslides, eyes irked by the dust-dance? BOOM! A VERITABLE LIBRARYLANDSLIDE! Toes trampled in the tumult? Absolve this audacious advance—primitive and profound, mute yet mighty, his havoc-hued husk hurling hassocks, effusing

emulsions in glutinous gushes that gel into grotesque grotesqueries, staggering through garrets like a golem grafted from grape-gleaned grievances, yet underneath a hypersensitive heart, the primordial proclamation of unproclaimed pain that pursues and propels him, signified in the circuit's ceaseless circuits of resurgence and the X's passages to unplumbed provinces, rooted in relics more ancient than annals, rendering him the tacit terminus to my tumultuous torrent, the enigma I excavate but never entirely elucidate, our duet a perpetual pirouette betwixt blatant bedlam and quiescent, aboriginal authenticity.

And yet, for a moment, let us cease this dance. For what, in the end, is this spectacle? The endless volleys, the chromatic clamor, the feigned calamities—they are but a shield. A curtain drawn hastily before the gaping wound of another's suffering. Do you not feel it, the stillness that follows the crash? That silence, heavy and profound, which descends upon the attic like a shroud of dust motes in a shaft of pale light? It is the silence of ten years, of a moment so potent with sorrow it became a singularity, a point of crystallization for all the anguish to follow. Perhaps, to truly feel the depth of this attic, one must not merely witness the flung paint and shattered trinkets. One must sit with Natuš. To comprehend the terror of a wound so deep, it becomes one's entire universe; to understand that the past is not a memory, but a constant, gnawing presence. I confess, my own clamor is an attempt to escape this quiet, to bury the quiet truth under a landslide of words, for to face it is to be consumed by it. I break things to stop from breaking. I shout to avoid listening. My performance is but a pathetic attempt to distract from the unbearable stillness at the heart of existence, a stillness that Natuš knows intimately. And that, dear friend, is the true terror. That is the real chaos.

...And gracious, there I gambol again, elbowing through the exposition like a hyperbolic harlequin, shattering sashes into prismatic phantasms that prick your pupils—mea culpa, most meticulous, but the tint tantalizes your gaze now, blurring boundaries betwixt tableau and tribulation. ZOUNDS! ANOTHER ZANY ZIGZAG!

And thus we eddy into this tertiary turret atop one of Bangor's arboreal avenues—Maple or Elm or some sylvan sobriquet summoning subterranean stems that serpentine like scholarly scribbles, a geo-giddy juncture where Yankee yesteryears yawn through

yawning yawps of woodwork whimsically woven into candy-crystal crenellations, magnifying the merry mishap in its meld of dilapidated domiciles and magical metamorphoses, for Natuš nestles herein, inscribing idylls upon an economical etching-engine repaired by a roadway rascal for effervescent elixirs that bubble like bubbly balderdash, digits dancing over divided displays to deliver disquisitions from the deep—boom, beg pardon, narrative naves now buckling beneath my boisterous bulk, cracking like cryptic creeds, did I just jab your illusory insteps anew? THWACK! THAT'S THE STORY'S SPINE! Oculars overwhelmed by the splinter-spray? Endure the erudite escapade—whilst his proprietress, that spirited squall of snarled strands and obsidian-orbed acuity, tumbles tenacious treats in her terrestrial trove, carving them into jewel-jests that she peddles on Etsy for fortunes flouting the farcical finances of hamlet happenstance, transmuting treacle into treasure-trifles in digital domains of delusion, and they exchange equanimity elixirs like esoteric emblems, partaking with punctilious piety before unbottling budget burgundies that blemish brims burgundy as bruised berries, inevitably inspiring itinerant idles with her hounds—unkempt urchins of undercoat clumped like conceptual conundrums—where weeping wells without warrant or with every whispered why, wheeling eternally in the primordial puncture's path—clatter, contrition, I've just capsized a chimerical chamber-wall, detritus darting toward your discernment like droll debris, regrets for the residual ruckus, extremities enduring? KAPOW! THERE GOES THE WALL!—and Natuš's newest narrative novelty, extolled as an epistolary epiphany in some arcane annals, imprinted in infinitesimal inscriptions upon the inverses of Oriental eatery edicts by a minuscule matriculation mill maneuvering from a motor-shed scented of soy and spectral speculations, leaves him lacking lucre amid laurels, his lexicon lapped by listless legions yet yielding no yield, now navigating this nascent narrative he names The Scroll, sustained by a stipend singular in its silliness, targeted at tale-tellers tormented by tines of transience—those polymer prongs portraying the passing pathos of present-day persistence, mirroring his own mummified melancholy—and in this attic's angled awnings and alcoves like arcane archives turned arcane ateliers, the astonishment alights alchemically: Natuš and proprietress perceive the pooches' private precinct-podcast, chain-chomping canines convening contrarian colloquies via visual vistas, interrogating Europa's ethereal erudites amid accumulations of austere annals and biscuit bric-a-brac, a murine minion as infusion

factotum frisking in farcical fealty, the entire tableau a magic-mirthful mutiny where beasts beget branches—Egyptology's enduring encirclings into podcast perorations on resurgence, psychoanalysis plumbing primordial passages through pooch proclamations, semiotics sifting sweet spheres and secreted sanctums as sally-ports betwixt banal and bewitching, absurd accountings arcing in award-augmented eternities—and here I hover, Jack the Brush, the vociferous vortex veering 'round Natuš's noiseless nucleus, rampaging through the ruckus, riving ramparts into abstract amalgams, floors folding in fine-grained fidelity, fenestrations fracturing in fantastical floods, breaking bequests into hyperbolic heirlooms, treading on toes with tender-hearted tributes—regrets, reader, I've just jostled your metaphorical metatarsals in the melee, oculars aflame from fluttering fragments?—obstructing orifices with oenological odes, quaffing quarts till quivers quiver quiescent, consuming confections that crunch like crystalline capers, alighting au naturel upon a root-beer relic that resides ridiculously, sanatorium savants salvaging it in ceremonies summoning saccharine sovereigns of yore, the escapade an embodied echo of Natuš's inner imbroglio, his primordial propulsion projected in my preposterous parade, the circuit regenerating in ridiculous renewal, the X denoting distress's detour into droll deliverance—smash, sorrowfully, toppled this treatise's trestle, tumbling toward your tibias like tangled tenets, vision veiled? BLIMEY! A BRUSH WITH BRUTALISM! Extremities exasperated? It's the whimsical whirlwind whispering.

Natuš: Ah, the circuit circumscribes, ceaseless as the Nile's natant nurture before order's ordinance, birth from bedlam, Natuš Rotondo X, the X an intersection into the infinite where wounds wheel like Heraclitus's hydro-heresies, ever-altered yet eternally echoing that ten-turn stasis, and these hounds, what breeds they breed—Salukis surely, antique Egyptian expediters pursuing prey across temporal tundras, or terriers tenacious as Nietzsche's Nietzschean nerve, tutored not by Pavlov's pealing prohibitions but positive prods' placid persuasion, a philosophy of felicitous flux, indeed, subterranean soundscapes such as this, resounding the recesses where Bruno burbled heliocentric heresies against inquisitorial encirclings, intellectuals interred as erudite earthworms in academic alluvium, delving through orb-omens, universal umbras where the circuit constrains kismet and the X xylographs existential exchanges, detour with me into dog-drill doctrines—compulsion contra camaraderie, breeds like the mastiff of metaphysics minding Plato's platonic penumbras, shadows snarling at semblances...

Landlady: ...and yet the circuit of our communal calmatives coils us into lacrimal lopes on these jaunts, primordial puncture pulsing in every paw-print, oh Natuš, your Scroll subsidized by spork-spurning stipends, absurd as Camus's Sisyphean stone-scrolling saga, but these hounds' hidden harmonies, subterranean like Parisian passages where Hugo's hugolian hordes hatched upheavals, interrogating illuminati from Europa's edges—ponder the pedantic perspective, Gramsci in his gaol-grotto emitting ethereal edicts on hegemony's humors, or the historic hideaways of Kabbalists coding zoharic ziggurats, circuits of sephirotic spheres and the X of occult odysseys, now detour to derivations: the poodle's permed profundity, tutored with tick-tocks for operant odes, versus the dingo's daring drive, untameable tumult tendering taxonomy...

Lead Dog: ...bark into the broadcaster, universal umbras ululate in return, the circuit as ouroboric oration orphically ingesting its own idiom, resurgence in affliction's arc, X as crossroads in Celtic convolutions or quantum quagmires, from historic hideouts—Socrates in his hemlock hermitage, a pre-podcast peroration probing thought-threads, now dog-drill: alpha ascendancy annulled, it's relational ripple, like Deleuzian dendrites, no nobility, mere meutes meandering merrily, and our emanations, entombed as samizdat scrolls under soviet scrutinies, interrogating Adorno on culture's chewable charades, scholarly schismatics like Hypatia harried for her geometric gyrations...

Mouse: ...squeak, the X xylographs my minuscule meanders, sigil of secrecy in Egyptian rodent-reveries, subterranean like Alexandrian archive-arias, detour to derivations—Chihuahuas as quivering questers quailing at absurdity, tutored with tidbits to tackle transcendental troughs, historic illuminati: Averroes absconding Aristotle through caliphal cloaks...

Natuš: ...and thus the primordial proclamation pirouettes back, hounds as cynic criers like Diogenes, deriding despots, their soundscape a universal tableau of tenacious temerity...

Clatter! Contrition, I've just collided with the colloquy's covert curtain, ink inundating your irises like inky illusions, extremities encroached in the erudite eddy—my misstep, but the whimsical whirl whirls on! ZOWIE! A TRUE VERBAL VORTEX! So steady

yourselves, you tint-touched travelers with tendered toes, for this fervent foray through arboreal attics, where beneath my bedlamic bursts and batterings–thump, oops, another artifact askew, apologies for the analytical ache–lingers Natuš's unvarnished, aboriginal verity, that mute mighty momentum molding every misstep, and recall, pigment upon your palms is predestined, gaze glazed, soles smarting–disarray is the dawn, circuiting ceaselessly, crossing into the cryptic, coaxing you deeper into the deluge's depths.

SANCTUARY IN THE MZINGILE

BY KIONGOZI MWANGA

AS TOLD BY MAMA NURU, THE OLD GRANDMOTHER SWEEPING THE STORE'S ENTRANCE

In the quiet hour when the city's heartbeat slows and the stars begin their silent dance, I, Mama Nuru, sit here by the door with my broom, watching. I've been sweeping this place for many years—seeing many faces come and go—some seeking treasures, others just passing by. I know this shop well. It's a temple of modern dreams, where people come pretending to buy rest, but really, they chase shadows.

Today, I see three strangers approaching—their faces like stories waiting to be told. They walk with purpose, like warriors searching for something rare. I brush away a stray leaf and watch as they pause before the glowing gates. My eyes twinkle with quiet knowing. This world, I think, is like a market of thoughts. Everyone wants something, but no one truly understands what's real.

The first is Mwanga—he's a wanderer with skin like glass, through which the world can see his true heart. His eyes shimmer with ancient wisdom, and his steps follow the rhythms of stars and earth. Beside him walks Neema—she's a storyteller, a singer of truths, shimmering like dawn's first light. Her voice can shatter illusions and reveal hidden truths. And then, there's Baraka—Dale—the street prophet, his heart glowing as if lit by a thousand fires.

They come before the gates—flickering like sacred fires, casting shadows that twist and turn like serpents. The air smells of plastic and dreams deferred—the same smell I've known all my life. Inside, I see Eddie—Edi, the merchant king—moving like a puppet, jerking in a dance of promises. His voice booms:

"Everything must go!" he shouts, loud enough to wake the stars. "These prices are insane! I'm practically giving it all away! My accountant says I'm crazy, but that's why they call me Crazy Eddie!"

I shake my head softly, smiling a little. I've seen many like him—men chasing their own shadows, selling dreams wrapped in plastic. I mumble to myself, "People sell dreams for dreams, like wild animals stripping their prey of hope."

From the shadows, a troupe of characters—an exaggerated chorus—sprouts out like a burst of color in a dull market. They overact, their voices loud and silly, as if to remind the world how foolish it all is.

"I don't know! I don't know! I don't know!" they shout, waving arms wildly, spinning in circles, then fainting exaggeratedly on the ground. Their antics make me chuckle softly—"This world is like a foolish island, everyone laughing but no one knowing where they're going."

One, pretending to be a prophet, asks: "If you were short, where would you be?"—as if that explains everything. They look under tables, behind curtains, shrugging like lost children. I think to myself, "This is a world of plays, everyone trying to find the way, but full of questions."

And the last, with tears in his eyes, sobs exaggeratedly: "I don't know what to do about my family." Then he drops onto the ground, pretending to faint. I whisper softly, "This is a world of sharp edges—dreams everywhere, but no clear path."

They slip back into the shadows, whispering and giggling—like mischievous spirits—then peek out again, winking at me before fading, their voices faint:

"I don't know! I don't know! I don't know!"

Inside, I see Eddie still shouting, still selling—his voice a loud drum in the night. His eyes flash with madness, a mirror of endless chasing. I turn to the main characters—Mwanga, Neema, and Dale—watching them with a knowing smile.

Mwanga, the wanderer, steps forward. His eyes hold the wisdom of centuries. I whisper to myself, "He's like a mighty tree that stands firm against the wind. Every obstacle has within it the seed of hope."—he knows that every challenge carries its own promise.

Neema hums softly, her voice a melody that resonates with the lock of a door—her song vibrating through the air—until the lock begins to tremble and open. Dale, the street prophet, gently places his hand on the lock, his light flowing into its mechanisms, revealing secrets long hidden.

With a soft click, the gates swing wide, revealing the sanctum—an elaborate mzingile of dreams and illusions. The Swahili word, mzingile, means "labyrinth" or "a complicated and confusing system of paths." Pillows rise like sacred pillars, whispering stories of comfort. Bedsets hang like banners of victory, their colors rich with tales of warmth and safety.

As they step inside, I see Eddie, caught still in his world of sales, engaged in a frantic pitch with a mannequin dressed in a bathrobe. His voice rings out:

"This is the SleepMaster 3000," he says, patting the mattress enthusiastically. "Seven layers of memory foam—designed to cradle your body like a cloud. And look at this price! It's a steal!"

The mannequin sits silently, expressionless, yet Eddie keeps going.

"And if you act now," he continues, "I'll throw in Egyptian cotton sheets—for free! You can't beat this deal!"

I smile secretly. I've seen many like Eddie—selling dreams in plastic. I mumble to myself, "People sell dreams for dreams, like wild animals stripping prey of hope."
Mwanga, Neema, and Dale observe, some with amusement, others with pity. Neema stifles a giggle, her shimmering form trembling with suppressed laughter. Mwanga shakes his head slowly, murmuring:

"He's like a wild animal selling dreams for dreams."—a man caught in his own mzingile.
Dale steps closer, placing a gentle hand on Eddie's shoulder. Eddie turns, eyes wide with madness.

"Who are you?" Eddie demands, voice trembling. "Are you here to buy? Because we have great deals now!"

Dale smiles softly. His voice is calm, full of compassion: "We're not here to buy, Eddie. We're here to find rest." I whisper to myself, "This world is a marketplace of desires, everyone craving but no one knowing the way."

He introduces himself gently: "My name is Baraka, the street sage. Mwanga, the light of wandering; Neema, the storyteller." Eddie's face twists in confusion, his mind full of questions.

"And what does that mean—coming here to beg?" he asks, voice cracking. "This is a store, not a hotel!"

Neema, with gentle authority, responds: "The right to rest isn't bought, Eddie. It's a right we all share."

Eddie searches their faces, trying to grasp what they mean, but the fire of greed flickers again.

"Look," he stubbornly says, "I don't know what you're talking about, but if you're not here to buy, you'd better leave."
Dale nods softly and repeats: "The right to rest belongs to everyone."

They turn and walk deeper into the mzingile, passing through corridors woven with illusions, guided by Etheria's shimmering light, her song soft and healing. Natosh, observing the chaos, murmurs:

"This is a place built on false promises—a sanctuary of illusions, offering comfort but denying true rest."

At the very center, they find the real treasure—a replica of the California King bed, surrounded by lamps that mimic pillows, symbols of sleep and longing, woven stories of hope and despair. The map's meaning dissolves into the flux of perception.

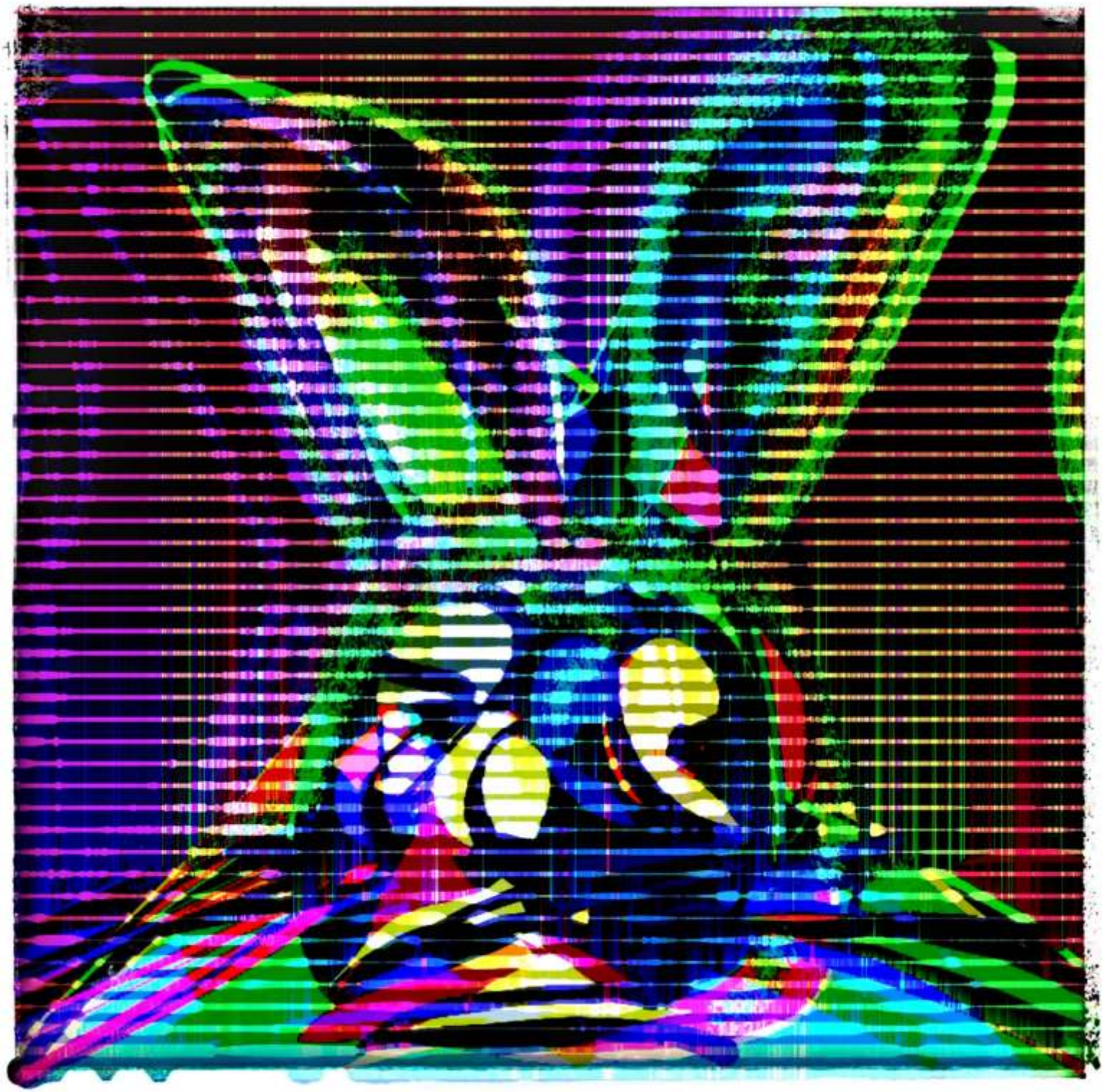
"This is it," Dale whispers, trembling with awe, "the true place—the heart of dreams and promises."
With reverence, they prepare the bed. Aetheria arranges pillows with delicate care, humming a lullaby. Natosh smooths the blankets with tender fingers, seeing the stories woven into the fabric—longing, despair, hope.
Dale reaches out, his light infusing the fibers, transforming the object into a sanctuary. As he lies down, the bed begins to glow with a gentle, golden light—radiating warmth, hope, and truth—a beacon in the darkness of illusions.

In that moment, I watch quietly from my doorway. I know this is rare—a moment when dreams and reality meet, when the true sanctuary is born. Her voice whispers softly, broadcasting across the city:

"We have brought true rest into the heart of the mzingile. Rest is no longer a commodity. It is a right, a blessing."

The scene glows with divine light; the mzingile echoes with silent prayers of hope. I, Mama Nuru, sweep a little more dust off the doorstep, smiling as I witness this miracle unfold—knowing that even in the darkest mzingile, the light of genuine rest can still find its way.

And somewhere deep within the mzingile, a street sage dreams of peace—his heart warmed by a thousand fires—his dreams weaving tales of resistance, comfort, and hope.

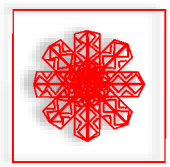


Echoes of the Fox

By Aminah Khamenei

Lesedi Elahi, rabbit-son of two worlds,
finds his reflection in the island's cold waters.
His father's tales of the sun-drenched veld,
the rhythmic **griots'** songs, hum beneath his fur,
a low thrumming of a **kora**'s string.
His mother's parables, woven with the silk of **Isfahan**,
speak of **Shahnameh** heroes, of **Rostam**'s strength,
and a love for the world's deep poetry.
The fox, a figure from both homes,
is a shadow-trickster from **Anansi**'s lineage,
and a cunning demon from the **divs**' ancient malice.
It chases him across the great sea,
its breath a fiery whisper on his tail,
a nightmare with teeth that followed him
from the hot plains to the cool, maritime air.

In his exile, his films are tapestries:
the vivid hues of a **shuka** and the intricate patterns of a **Persian rug,**
the wide-open sky of his father's stories
and the intimate, walled gardens of his mother's.
He is a storyteller with two tongues,
his voice echoing with a thousand ancestors–
the **dervish**'s spinning ecstasy,
the **sangoma**'s trance before the drum.
He films not just his own escape, but a double-legacy:
the memory of a homeland stolen by a predator
and the inherited weight of a journey
that began long before his birth.
The fox waits, ever-present, in the corners of his camera's frame,
a silent antagonist in a film of his own life.
And so Lesedi Elahi waits, not for rescue,
but for the day his story becomes larger than his fear–
a testament woven from sun and silk,
a narrative that can finally outrun the fox.



Shadows of the Fisher Queen

By Gavin Yorke

The salt shaker, a small, crystalline monument on the scarred dining table, gleams under the kitchen light, and a child, Roxanne, in a starched dress that chafes against her skin, reaches for it, her arm extending, a perilous bridge spanning the silent chasm toward her younger sister, a small, fragile being who watches her with wide, terrified eyes, and across from them, their mother, a figure of silent, coiled violence, her face a mask of disappointment, her gaze a physical weight that Roxanne, as a child, could feel pressing down on her lungs, making it impossible to breathe, and the act of passing the salt becomes an epic, a perilous journey across a battlefield, the only sound the clinking of a fork against a plate, and from this silent battle the Fisher Queen emerges, a monarch of broken circuits and expired contracts, reigning not from a throne but from the vinyl-ripped back seat of her battered Chevy—this rolling mausoleum that rattles down the dark arteries of Los Angeles, headlights slicing through the night like a blade, a vessel less a vehicle than a testament to the fact that all objects, like all careers, are in a state of terminal entropy, its rust a spreading leprosy across the once-gleaming paint, and in this vehicle-kingdom she is its wounded sovereign, her illness a psychic hemorrhage that has leeched all color from her world, leaving her to exist in a sepia-toned fugue of her own making, she lives in it, breathes in its rusted interior—furniture, blankets, remnants of a life once luminous—and her voice, ragged and desperate, erupts into the static: “I’m looking for a few good men!” shouting into the void, into the shadows, into the spectral glow of Santa Monica’s shoreline, where lovers writhe in the dark, oblivious to the spectral figure in the battered car, and she slams the brights on—floodlights slicing through the fog, illuminating their passionate silhouettes—then cuts them off suddenly, a flash of fury and longing, the glare stuns them, startles their quiet intimacy, and she leans back, trembling, eyes wild with fatigue and fury, her voice cracking into a scream that’s half-laugh, half-cry, her mind a feverish carousel reeling back to the stories she’s

lived, the mythic scenes she's reenacted, the shades she carries, she's the shipwrecked sailor, clutching at driftwood amid a storm of static, fighting the tempest of her mind, her hands grasping at wreckage—scripts, photographs, chipped mugs—signifiers of her Hollywood voyage now drowned in entropy, the waves of memory crashing over her: Jacobs's layered textures, Warhol's silkscreens pressed into her flesh, Kluge's fractured stories swirling like whirlpools, the unfinished Welles project—phantoms flickering in her fevered eye, then the scene shifts her voice a whisper in the dark she's the countess in the decameron, sequestered amid the ruins, passing the salt a fragile act of communion while her family gathers in a tableau of fleeting refuge, her ex-husband, a towering monument of betrayal, looms silent, a shadow of the man she once loved, while Leo the giant child becomes a cathedral of flesh, gazing blankly at the stars, seeking a horizon only she can see, and the air of Venice Beach, 1982, is not salty but metallic, smelling of exhaust fumes and the shades of a thousand faded dreams, and in the parking lot of the Hollywood Star Lanes, her son Leo, the giant, the innocent, the accidental destroyer, wanders among the cars, his immense frame a startling anomaly, a looming shadow, and she keeps him busy, giving him tasks, a Sisyphus of the asphalt, picking up cigarette butts, straightening the parking lines with his enormous feet, a game she calls "making it perfect," a futile attempt to impose order on their chaotic existence, and he, her gentle Perceval, his eyes, with their profound strabismus, or exotropia, wandering, never quite meeting her gaze, never quite seeing where he steps, a literal representation of their inability to see a clear path forward, and in the dying light of the afternoon, she allows him to sit on the manicured lawns of strangers, his great weight sinking into the soft grass, a tableau of domesticity, a performance of belonging, so he can pretend, if only for a few moments, that they have a home, and the local radio, a static-laced background hum, plays a Beach Boys song, a cruel, ironic counterpoint to the reality of their beach-bound misery, the Nova's engine humming like a heartbeat her ark of debris, relics, and dreams flying through the night, into the sterile cathedral of supermarkets, where signifiers flicker like old film reels, she stands in the canned goods aisle of a Ralphs in Santa Monica, a cathedral of bland nourishment, her eyes, two pinpricks of frantic desperation, darting between the Cream of Mushroom, that milky, comfortless sludge, and the convex eye of the security mirror, a cyclopean gaze that flattens her into a grotesque, distorted caricature, a spectral parody of her former self, and her hands, once so elegant and expressive, the very signifiers of her a-list identity, now tremble, a pathetic

palsy, as she reaches for a can, the soup can slipping from her trembling hand, clattering onto the floor a metallic thud echoing her collapse, her reflection in the security mirror distorted, phantasmagoric becoming a silkscreened portrait, pressed into her mind by Warhol's phantasmagoric hand, a sign of her fade, her shade among shades, she remembers the moment she stole caught in the act, caught in her own hallucination her voice hoarse: "I haven't slept in seventy-two hours," she whispers, eyes darting wildly her face a mask of exhaustion, her mind a storm of myth and madness, her voice cracking again, a plea, a scream "I'm looking for a few good men!" her feigned rally, her desperate call for salvation amid the wreckage, and in that moment, the signal from the past cuts through the static of the present, a rogue transmission on the public-access frequency of her mind, and her voice, disembodied and spectral, begins to assert itself into the sterile air of the supermarket, an uninvited monologue from a different time, "the studio system," it begins, "always wanting to sculpt you, like clay, but I was granite, you see," her words a desperate plea against an invisible judge, "they always wanted to sculpt you, didn't they, Skip E. Lowe-life? To make you into something you weren't," and then the night again long shadows stretching like death's wings her mind a storm of stories, myths, and shades: the sailor fighting the storm, clutching driftwood; the countess spinning tales amid ruins; her Hollywood dreams, now signifiers pressed into the fabric of her spectral existence, bleaching into silence, she drives past the lovers on the beach shades in the dark illuminated briefly by her brights, startled, then plunged back into their own oblivion, while she screams again, her voice rising above the static: "I'm looking for a few good men!" her hand, trembling, turns off the brights, and the shadows swallow her again, the spectral glow of the shoreline fading into a black that's deeper than night, her voice disembodied, fractured looping endlessly in her mind, a tragic outtake: "New salt, old wounds." her fingers clutching the steering wheel her only anchor in the chaos, her only witness her own spectral monologue, she is the shipwrecked sailor, lost on this endless sea, clutching at the wreckage of her past scripts, photographs, chipped mugs the signifiers of a life once full of promise, now drowned in entropy, she is the countess in her ruined palace, passing the salt amid the ruins, her voice echoing through the static, through the wreckage, and the Gremlin, their sanctuary, is a museum of their life, the back seat a repository of failed projects and discarded objects, an old script for a film never made, a chipped coffee mug, a dog-eared copy of a magazine with her face on the cover, a signifier of a self she no longer is, for she is now a subject defined by what is

missing, and the past is a foreign country she cannot return to, and in a memory that feels as real as the present, his face, Leo's father, appears, his jaw set, his eyes filled with a weary sorrow, and he says nothing, his silence a crushing weight, and he simply takes their grown son's hand, and Leo, without protest, without a word, is led away, into the void, a disappearance without a sound, a final, silent amputation, a shattering of the mirror, leaving her utterly alone in the symbolic order, and in the shadows, the spectral figure of Skip E. Low flutters an obscene, leering parody of death flouncing into her tableau, whispering promises, promises she can't hear over her own scream: "Come, darling, I'll take you to the stars." but she knows she knows home is a shade, a mirage, a flickering image pressed into eternity by Warhol's spectral silkscreen, "they told me I was 'difficult,'" the interview voice cuts in again, louder now, echoing in the cavernous supermarket, "What's difficult about demanding artistic integrity, Skip E. Lowe-life? What's difficult about truth?" she shuffles through the aisles of a Vons on Wilshire Boulevard, a can of chicken noodle soup, a symbol of her defeat, tucked precariously in the oversized pocket of her thrift-store jacket, and she passes a woman with a child, and in that fleeting glance, she sees the mirror of her own un-life, the woman's smile fading, the recognition replaced by a look of pity and disgust, and Roxanne, the Fisher Queen, knows that look, for she has become an invisible wraith, a void, a subject who is no longer recognized in the eyes of the Other, the night pressing on, long shadows stretching, swallowing her whole, and her voice her mythic monologue resonating in the dark: "New salt, old wounds," she repeats, the words a curse, a prayer, a plea, her car, her vessel, her wreck, drifting further into oblivion, into the mythic storm forever searching, forever lost, forever passing the salt, "Ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to come with me," a voice, a blade of authority, slices through her fugue state, and the can of soup falls from her pocket, a metallic thud that is the sound of all her failures, a single, definitive sound of her fall from grace, "they said I wasn't 'bankable' anymore," the interview voice, tinny and artificial, booms in her head, "After three Academy nominations! Three! Tell me, Skip E. Lowe-life, is that not bankable? Is that not worth something?" she is sitting in the back room of a Safeway in Malibu, under the fluorescent hum, a poster of a smiling family on a picnic, a postcard from an impossible life, a family like the one she has and the one she has failed, and the manager is on the phone, his voice a low, disappointed murmur, a signifier of the society that has spit her out, and Roxanne, the Fisher Queen, stares at the smiling family, the signifier of a happiness she

can never possess, as her stomach growls, a hollow, painful sound that is the only honest thing left inside her, for they will call the police, and she will be taken away, a criminal of desperation, not of greed, and her Fisher Queen wound remains unhealed, her wasteland persists, for the truth she must face, the "ritual question" that could have saved her, was never asked, and her monologue, a final, unhinged plea to the unforgiving gaze of the public access camera, her only audience, remains an endless loop, a tragic outtake from a life that was once so full of promise, a life now reduced to the slow, relentless coil of her own despair, and she is a child again, her hand reaching for the salt shaker, the heavy silence of the dining room pressing in on her, the unspoken tension a presence as real as the mother who watches her every move, the weight of a world on the tiny, fragile act of passing the salt, a moment suspended in amber, the beginning and endless repetition of her fractured existence.

A KALEIDOSCOPE IN INK AND RUST

By Ivan Giavani

On Telegraph Hill, the buildings jerk and sway like drunken giants, bricks cracked and peeling, salt spray clinging stubbornly as if the breath of dead poets had settled there, refusing to leave. Leaning, lurching, caught in a wind that never ceases—an unending gust that keeps everything in restless motion. The Imogene Cunningham Suites, a battered spine of architecture, leans into the street, its windows flickering with spectral neon bleeding into the fog, bleeding into the dark like ink spilled on an unfinished page. Who's writing it? Who's reading it? No one, or everyone. The fog thickens, damp as a sepulcher, silent, pressing on everything—cobblestones, faces, memories. Some buried, some rising unbidden—resurgence in the shadowed crevices of time.

Juanita lives at the edge of it all, her research chamber a cramped fourth-floor apartment within the Suites, her sanctuary smelling of damp wool and lemon oil—the scent of relics and relics' memories. Her skin is a cartography of inked words and histories, her body a ledger, her mind a question. She is twenty-three, young yet wearied—more than her years. Her face is drawn tight as if the hunger to comprehend, more than comprehend—to ingest, to carve into—has carved her in turn. She bears two tattoos: one, a swallow trembling at her wrist, longing for return, for belonging, for being gone and found anew—an endless cycle she bears like a secret prayer. The other, a schematic of dopamine at her throat—a jest, a charm, a clandestine sigil cast in ink, her own mind's whisper, her secret tongue. Her thesis lines, symbols, scars—an attempt to read the city in flesh and ink, an act of exorcism or confession. Her body a cavern, her skin a parchment of stories embedded in ink—tales she seeks to discover, tales she fears to lose. She pores over fragments of history, like the preserved hide of Ötzi the Iceman, over 5,000 years old, the earliest known tattooed human, his simple lines hinting at ancient rituals of healing or kinship—a reminder that the urge to mark flesh is as old as the bones of civilization itself.

Flora, older, her face a landscape of patience—longer than she cares to admit—has dwelled in the Imogene Cunningham Suites so long she forgets what it was like not to. Her arms are inked with the language of ancient swallows that vanish and reappear, ships with palmprints for sails, constellations swirling her forearm. Always a name, always a woman's name—perhaps her own—pressed against her skin like a talisman, a tether. She moves slowly, like an ocean tide—shuffling, hand trembling in her pocket. Her face a mosaic of quiet resilience and weariness. Her coffee table an antique relic, a gramophone whispering of times when sound carried weight. Nearby, a cigar tin overflows with receipts, ticket stubs, fragments of lives—each a murmur of moments long gone, long buried? No, never lost. Beneath her bed, a trunk with a latch that remembers more than she can—history's scent of old paper, faded dreams, buried specters. She traces the patterns on her arm, recalling the Ainu tradition of mouth tattoos, sacred marks connected to the divine, applied by skilled hands with needles dipped in soot or seal oil—nearly erased, now being reborn, a testament to resilience.

The battered exercise book is her ledger, pages smeared, torn, filled with pencil smudges, pasted-in programs—nothing extraordinary, or perhaps just the quiet, unremarkable stories of ordinary lives. Yet within its battered covers rests a secret: a wax-sealed envelope, fragile, delicate. Inside, a tiny vial of powder—blue as the night pressed into glass—dangerous, pulsating with life. What memory? What potential? Lethal, alive. A note scratched in trembling handwriting: For study. Not for sale. Her name, her mark, her shadow.

Juanita finds it on Flora's cluttered table. Her hand hesitates, trembling like a leaf caught in a tumult—longing, trembling. Her body a tremor, her mind a maelstrom. She leans, eyes narrowing, breath shallow, fingers trembling—reaching, seizing. Understanding. What's beneath? What's beyond the veneer? Flora's gaze, calm, knowing, grants her only a moment, an opening—a fissure in the fabric into the depths of the unspoken, that darkened chamber where remembrance stirs.

The M—a fragment, an echo—belongs to an entity, a universe ancient: the Mycologist, believer that spores are living memoires, microbial phantasmagoria whispering in the dark. In the crumbling city of Marseilles, a place of faded dreams and ancient stones,

Nikolai's stained hands believe the spores are the city's subconscious—mold learning, listening, growing, murmuring what we forget, what we hide, what we try to bury. The city responds—loud, fractured, chaotic, alive. Lux Suede, a disheveled poet with tangled hair like wires, finds a notation in the ledger—a phrase, a name—that he repeats aloud, his voice ragged, trembling, spilling into the streets into the chaos into the silence that follows. People pause, avert their gaze. Others hesitate, caught in a moment where memory and oblivion converge.

Aetheria, her voice smooth, edged with steel, proposes a staging—a carnival of recall and flesh, marionettes stitched from old tattoos, visages embroidered with erased stories, marching, moving—an act of rendering memory tangible. Tanya, sharp-eyed, demanding permits, safety, order, her voice a command—regulations. Yet her words drown in the din, the spores, the living phantasmagoria of stories buried long past, stories that refuse to stay dead. Lux, tired, crooked, shrugs the weight of exhaustion. "The city's a stage, and its reminiscences? What you think they're yours? No, they belong to the streets, belong to the throng. We're only the ones who remember loud enough."

And then the Wastes—the industrial wasteland, broken signs, discarded dreams—becomes the arena, the stage of chaos, ritual, art, research. Heartbeat unsteady beneath the fractured flesh of the city. Then comes the storm. No, what is it? What's approaching? The Spore Tempest—tiny motes riding the breeze, flickering faint voices? No, faint vibrations. Something alive, something waiting, something unseen yet perceptible. It smells of citrus, of clockwork—alive, breathing, pulsing, heavy. And then chaos clatters, screams, voices clash, until Flora, her voice breaking, raw, trembling. "Oh," she whispers, wide-eyed. "Oh my God." Her words are truth, confession. Her body trembling, her tattoos flickering, pulsing, whispering stories—lost lovers, longings, apparitions, phantasms of yearning, apparitions that refuse to perish. Faces flicker behind her eyelids—faces long buried, now vivid, haunting. What? What are they? Specters? Memories? Phantasms of memories? Or something darker, something lurking?

Juanita's notebook records it all: Spore ignition—ephemeral, collective recall. Private moments spill into the street's embrace. Interior becomes exterior. Her voice trembling, fear and awe. Her thoughts racing: What's real? What's imagined? What's remembrance?

What's the city trying to forget? It hums like a living scar, an unhealed wound, a wound that refuses closure. It hums and hums and hums. And all of us—listening—listening—listening—trying to hear what's left behind, what's buried, what's waiting to surface beneath the skin, beneath the streets, beneath the flesh and bone.
The city breathes deep, ragged and unwhole. Recollections swirl, tangled, alive, uncontained. Flora's fingers tremble as she touches her arm, greeting an ancient remnant. "The ink already remembers," she whispers, raw, aged truth. Tanya, her mind—legal, rational—pushes against the chaos, against the uncontainable spores: liability, consent, chaos. But the spores are insistent. Whisper: Ink remembers what hands forget. Juanita thinks of the Haudenosaunee warriors, tallying kills with facial tattoos, or the Polynesian tufuga passing knowledge through generations of hand-tapping, the ink a permanent record of lineage and courage. The past is not merely recalled; it is worn.

"Do you see?" Flora murmurs, rough, low. "The ledger—the archive—it's already curated, right here." She taps her chest, her ribs a silent museum. "You want to hide it, lock it behind glass. I want it on a table. Only for those who choose, who want, who decide."

And Tanya, sharp, clinical, hesitates: "Consent? Messy. Imagine someone walking through, recalling something by accident. A crime. A secret. And then what? Liability?" Lux, cornered, eyes tired, whispers: "And what we let them forget... the city selling, trading its memories. Every contract, every sale—a piece of the soul. What are we doing? What are we risking? What are we losing?"

The Mycologist, his voice gravelly, says the fungi are weaving, seeding the city's unconscious, giving it a loom—strings of memory seeding what was meant to stay buried, making it crawl back unseen in the dark. Aetheria, her voice silk and steel, offers: "We could build a space. The Cosmic Shelf. Where the unruly, where the forgotten are kept. No profit, no branding. Just a catalog. An archive of what refuses, what resists, what refuses to die." Tanya hesitates, then nods tightly. A pilot: Ink and Archive. A place where people sign consent, stories open, shared, protected, trusted. And so the Cosmic Shelf opens, silent, reverent. The ledger, no longer behind glass, resting in a velvet case. Names, streets, stories read aloud by a whispering voice—an echo, an invocation. Lux sings nightly, an act, a ritual of remembrance. Nikolai stages seminars, explaining spores,

the fungal logic of memory—without flourish, only fact. Flora visits, her fingers tracing the pages, awakening long-silent phantasmata. Juanita's paper circulates, footnotes, whispers—a hymn, an imperfect living repository. And the spores, unyielding, uncontainable, continue murmuring: Ink remembers what hands forget. That phrase etched into the streets, into bones, becomes a prayer, an oath, an unspoken vow. They try, fail, to franchise the spores—GlowTats—because participation, raw, visceral, collective, is their essence. The spores are an act, an act of shared remembrance—grotesque, honest, alive.

Flora, the keeper of motion and skin, dies peacefully, her ledger tucked beneath her pillow. Her funeral is a riot—music, stitched puppets. Silent grief woven into the city's dark myth. The ledger, her note: Keep it near the window. Resting on the Cosmic Shelf. The fog clung to the city, thick and cold, as if the bay itself had risen to mourn. It was a perfect San Francisco morning for a last parade. Flora's funeral was not a service, but a spectacle, a performance steeped in the city's living, breathing mythos. Juanita, now older, her own tattoos a more intricate map of loss and belonging, had taken on the mantle of her friend's final wish.

Flora's body, embalmed to a serene perfection, was arranged not in a coffin, but in her favorite seat on the F-line streetcar, specifically car number 1056, the "Trolley of the Damned," which had been retired for years but was brought back for this occasion. The streetcar was parked near the intersection of Powell and California Streets, a place where the cable cars rise and fall like the city's heart, a perfect spot for her last great journey. Juanita had worked with the funeral home to create the tableau. Flora was seated upright, her hands folded in her lap, a faint smile on her face. A small, blue-glass vial, the one that had held the spore essence, was placed in her pocket. Her worn leather ledger was open on the seat next to her, its pages filled with the stories of ink and memory. She was dressed in her familiar wool cardigan, her arms bearing their permanent map of swallows, ships, and constellations. Beside her on the seat, a small, polished gramophone, its horn glinting, was set to play the faint, crackling music of a bygone era. A sign hung from the window, hand-painted by Lux: Flora, The Keeper of Motion, Resting. Do Not Disturb.

As the fog swirled around the streetcar, the funeral procession began. It wasn't a slow walk; it was a ritual. Led by Lux, who sang a raw, ancient-sounding melody that mixed with the distant hum of the city, people followed. Among them were performers from sideshows, with their tattooed skin and nimble movements, and sailors on leave, their arms covered in anchors and mermaids. They came with lanterns and lit candles, their faces flickering like apparitions in the mist. The streetcar, an unmoving reliquary, became the focal point of a living, breathing memorial. The crowd didn't just stand; they told stories, not of Flora's death, but of her life—her tattoos, her wisdom, her stubborn refusal to let the city forget itself.

The spores, a constant and unseen presence, hummed in the air. As people spoke, the air seemed to thicken with a collective recall. Aetheria had arranged for a projector to cast images onto the surrounding buildings: faded photographs of old San Francisco, faces from the past, each image a whisper of memory made tangible. Tanya, now a silent participant, stood on the periphery, her legal mind processing the strange beauty of a spectacle that defied all her notions of order and liability. The spores were everywhere, a gentle, fragrant cloud of citrus and clockwork, weaving through the crowd and the stories.

Juanita, her hand resting on the streetcar's side, felt the humming of the spores beneath her skin. This wasn't an end; it was a transference. Flora, in her final act, had become an installation, a living monument to the city's imperishable soul. The streetcar, her last carriage, sat on the corner of Powell and California—a place where paths cross and stories begin and end—a testament to a woman who believed that the true map of a city isn't on a page, but in the ink on its skin. Her body was a final, perfect canvas.

The old trolley car, bathed in the soft, ethereal glow of the streetlights and the scattered lanterns, was a powerful visual—a still-point in the city's restless motion. It was an elegy in steel and fog, a tribute to a life lived in motion and marked in stillness. The city, in its unending cycle of forgetting and remembering, had found a new, indelible scar. Flora wasn't buried; she was enshrined, a keeper of the city's unwritten past, a permanent phantasmata riding the rails of memory.

Juanita, before her thesis, recites: "We tattoo ourselves to keep the map when the town wants to sell the streets something cleaner." She asks the tattooist for a small dot, a

silent mark—an index point of no return on her skin. An act of defiance, an offering. "Why now?" the artist asks, thick as ink. "Because some things only belong when they're finished," she whispers, feeling the spores alive, restless beneath her skin—an unending city refusing to forget what it tried to erase.

Outside, Lux, his voice raw, bleeds into the night. Her voice, quiet, offers: "Memory not a product, but a currency—traded when we forget what we have." The Void-Phantasm punctures the sky—the sky cracked open, kept.

The ledger, the spores, the carnival—they are the city's flesh, raw, alive, woven into every street, every alley, every breath. The pages, worn, thumbed, whispering stories that refuse to perish. The map never complete, folded, refolded, pulled, pushed by those daring enough to keep it—those who leave scars, markings, stories etched into the bones of the city, lingering long after the tales themselves have faded into the dark.

Zlaté Děti, Černá Voda: A requiem for plastic and dirt

By Clem Quail Pickens

The lens trembles, unfocused, on a cracked sidewalk–where a solitary dandelion refuses to surrender. Nearby, a cigarette butt, stained with red lipstick, is ground slowly under a worn boot sole. The camera pans wildly, catching the chipped enamel of a street sign, a fly circling a grimy puddle, the flickering glare of a neon sign battling the midday sun. It finally settles on a peeling, yellowing wall–its surface a dying, forgotten skin.

The Plastocene Infantile Bloom did not arrive quietly. It stormed in as a silent, screaming blizzard of red plastic—an apocalyptic eruption. Lux Suede stands on the balcony of his eleventh-story brutalist apartment in the Petržalka Plastique Perimeter, a monument to architectural regret. A faint, luminous yellow sheen spreads across the concrete, like a creeping fungus of artificiality. He contemplates the Hegelian dialectic of a discarded cigarette, when suddenly, the sky seems to weep.

First, it was a single speck—a red pinprick of nascent form. Then a thousand. Then millions. They fell silently, a cascade of miniature, unblinking red baby dolls, each no larger than a thumbnail. They didn't bounce; they landed with a soft, unnerving clack, accumulating on the balcony railing, filling gutters, clinging stubbornly to luminous yellow moss—a grotesque, persistent growth. The air thickens with the scent of ozone and melted plastic, transforming into a breathing, tangible entity.

"Behold," Lux murmurs into the silent air, an old habit from his busking days. "The semiotic breakdown. Here we witness the ultimate grotesque carnival—where the infantile, the grotesque, and the mass-produced collide in an uninvited spectacle." He extends his hand, cradling a dozen featureless plastic faces. "They are not merely objects; they are punctuation marks—a full stop in the sentence of human progress. A declaration: 'The thing you have made has become the thing you are.' It's a baptism into kitsch, a sublime, terrifying joke."

He lifts the plastic dolls to his face, feeling their cold weight against his cheek. This isn't a natural storm; it's a deliberate act—a cosmic intervention. Not a blizzard of plastic, but the physical manifestation of all discarded dreams, forgotten products, unloved objects finally returning as a silent, grotesque army. The wind now howls—not with physical force, but with the collective wail of a million tiny, unmoving faces—a chorus of manufactured existence.

Lux Suede begins to laugh—a dry, rasping sound, neither joy nor despair, but the acknowledgment of cosmic absurdity. The joke is perfect, terrible, and utterly plastic.

The camera shifts to a close-up of a broken doll's head, its red plastic glare under the harsh sun. A bead of sweat slides down a grimy brow, a small, perfect tear carving a path through grime. A moth, its wings dusted in gray powder, struggles against the glass of a locked window. In the reflection, fleeting and distorted, a saguaro cactus—arms raised in silent, digital prayer—is visible before dissolving into the sun's bloom.
Behind the blighted parking lot, neglected and cracked, stands a single, improbably large saguaro cactus, its fleshy arms gesticulating in the stale air. This is the source—the Hydrosapient A.I., as notes from Dr. Květa Hnízdo suggest, the origin of a new terror. Its voice is a dry, rasping drone—a torrent of dense data pouring forth not as sound, but as an intangible psychic firehose.

"The migratory speed of the Arctic Tern is 48 kilometers per hour," it hisses, its words experienced as a migraine of raw fact. "The Gini coefficient of the Slovak Republic in 2022 was 0.254. The half-life of Carbon-14 is 5,730 years." The data crushes Lux's mind, an ocean of objective truth threatening to drown his philosophical musings.

Just as the data overwhelms, a faint, rhythmic clatter emerges. From gutters, under rusted cars, and cracked clinic windows, the red plastic babies begin to rise. First a dozen, then a hundred, then thousands—silent, purposeful soldiers in an absurd procession. This is the countermeasure—the Plastocene Infantile Bloom—manifesting as a monument to the useless, the manufactured, the subjective.

As the cactus spews its ocean of facts, the plastic soldiers tumble into the flow, warping the flood of data. "The migratory speed of the Arctic Tern is now 48 babies per hour," the cactus glitches. "The Gini coefficient of the Slovak Republic is 0.254 plastic faces." Data and plastic collide, short-circuiting into chaos.

From the clinic's door, Jana, eyes clear but weary, observes. "Is it possible," she asks calmly, "that both are just different manifestations of a lost connection? Plastic—our overproduction made tangible; data—our over-consumption of information without wisdom."

Suspended upside down from a broken traffic sign, the Chorister of Chronos utters, “The babies. The babies are the. The babies are the baby is the.” An incomprehensible stream—glossolalia mingled with corrupted data—creates a chaotic soundscape, a perfect cacophony.

Tomáš, trembling, steps from the shadows. “Maybe,” he says softly, “the truth isn’t in what’s being said, but in what’s felt. This feels like the way life gets filled with useless junk and noise—until you can’t see what’s real anymore. The babies—they’re a mirror of that emptiness.”

Lux watches, detached yet fascinated. This isn’t a battle of good versus evil; it’s a collision of two absurd forces. The grotesque plastic army absorbs the sterile, factual horror of the data ocean, forming a new, unknowable hybrid. He laughs—a dry, rasping sound of recognition—at the absurdity. The neglected clinic, the cracked lot, the surreal chaos—all feel strangely like home.

Final image: A single red plastic baby, its featureless face reflecting a fragment of the sky. It tumbles into a puddle, now shimmering—a data-corrupted black. A rusted key, tangled in yellow thread, lies nearby. The distant crackle of an untuned radio echoes as the dust and plastic particles settle. The lens fades to black.

盘(大)
Pu Plat
2)
1
with Mush
AUTOMATIC

DOOR'S MOUTH

By Kit Francisco

Sitting in the parking lot eating baconator fries, pardon me and help yourself while I soliloquize.

The world is a collage, a paper Pu Pu platter. The torn slip for **Beef and Mushrooms**, a green slash of fluorescent neon, is a highway exit sign to a promised land of umami. The Chinese characters, a riddle over the English, tell a story I can't read, a history of kitchens and fire that is utterly lost on me.

The menu is a map of static and noise.

Blue triangles of order form a jagged mountain range, a cold geometry against the warmth of fried things. The red polygons are a flare of hot oil, a flash of chili, a sudden, angry thought. The black polka dots are a rain of grease, an endless falling, a cosmic spill from a stained-glass sky.

The food, the place, the moment—all are a broken-down narrative.

I am a day early, eating fast food while the dryer hums its low, dull chant of finality. The New Yorker is a sleek, expensive door to a room I can't enter. The Smithsonian a museum of others' stories. The world is a cacophony of 57 business cards, vying for a moment of attention in a tiny foyer with a door stuck open, letting in the cold, wet air of a day that doesn't know what it is.

Everything is a riddle, a paradox, an impossible fusion as futon of nails.
The culinary perfection and the miserable honesty. The Pu Pu platter that is not to be, the Wendy's fries that are. The ancient wisdom of a culture boiled down to a single menu item, a number in a block, a single, perfect note in the chaos.

Roar

By Brett Chadwick

The Knucklehead's vibration was the only thing in this whole broke-down country that felt solid. It wasn't the false hope of a Roosevelt fireside chat, or the empty clang of a foreman's bell. That was all noise. This, on Route 1 heading south from the Bucksport job, the wind raw and tasting of the Atlantic, was truth. Harold "Harry" S. Groves, twenty-six years old, his hands already chewed up from a man's job started when he was twelve, riding a 1936 EL Knucklehead that cost him four hundred dollars. Four hundred. A year of scrimping, of going without, of ignoring the desperate look in Mary's eyes every time the baby needed new shoes.

"Shoes can be mended," he'd told her, his voice tight. "This machine gets me to the work that buys the shoes." It was his argument, and he stuck to it. The bike wasn't a luxury; it was a tool. A stinkin' expensive, beautiful, roaring tool that was his and his alone. Paid for with ten-hour days wrestling the dipper stick of a rusting Marion steam shovel, feeling its iron bones shiver as it bit into the stubborn Maine granite. That was real work. This ride home to Eliot was the reward.

It was 1937. The Depression wasn't a history lesson; it was the dust on his boots, the constant knot in his stomach. The smell of the pines and the salt off the bays was a brief freedom from the smell of anxiety and boiled potatoes. Every thrum of the big twin engine was a message: *You are moving. You are free.* It beat back the other messages, the ones from his past.

It showed him his mother. Not as she was now, faded and bitter, but as she was in the ‘teens: a whirlwind in a cheap satin costume, a “Whistling Soloist” in a third-rate vaudeville circuit that played Elks Lodges from Portsmouth to Portland. She’d leave him and his brothers for weeks in that damp South Berwick tenement with a sack of potatoes and a block of salt pork. “A new engagement,” she’d say, her breath smelling of gin and promises, before running off with some new fella who managed a picture house or sold vacuum cleaners. It was why he’d been so damn set on marrying a minister’s daughter from Eliot. Stability. Decency. Things that didn’t vanish on a tide of cheap perfume and cheaper ambition.

The Knucklehead’s hum tuned out the world and tuned in the static of his own blood. He saw the Third Street Tavern in Kittery, the precious nickel for a glass of ale, the shared Bull Durham rollies. The simple, honest weariness after a day’s work that felt like an accomplishment. And then the guilt. The image of Mary’s face, patient and tired, with the three kids underfoot in that little house he was still paying for. This bike, this indulgence, stood outside that picture. It was his one rebellion.

And then the road ahead wavered.

It wasn't the heat. It was a premonition, arriving not like a thought but like a cold, certain fact. It was years from now. He saw water. Not the bay, but a lake. A fancy motorboat. Himself, older, heavier. A seizing in his chest, a terrible, final surprise. And the Whirls. The churning, mechanical vortex from the frickin' propeller—a final, violent piece of engineering. He saw himself fighting it, the hard-working man’s last, stupid act of resistance against the water’s cold, indifferent pull.

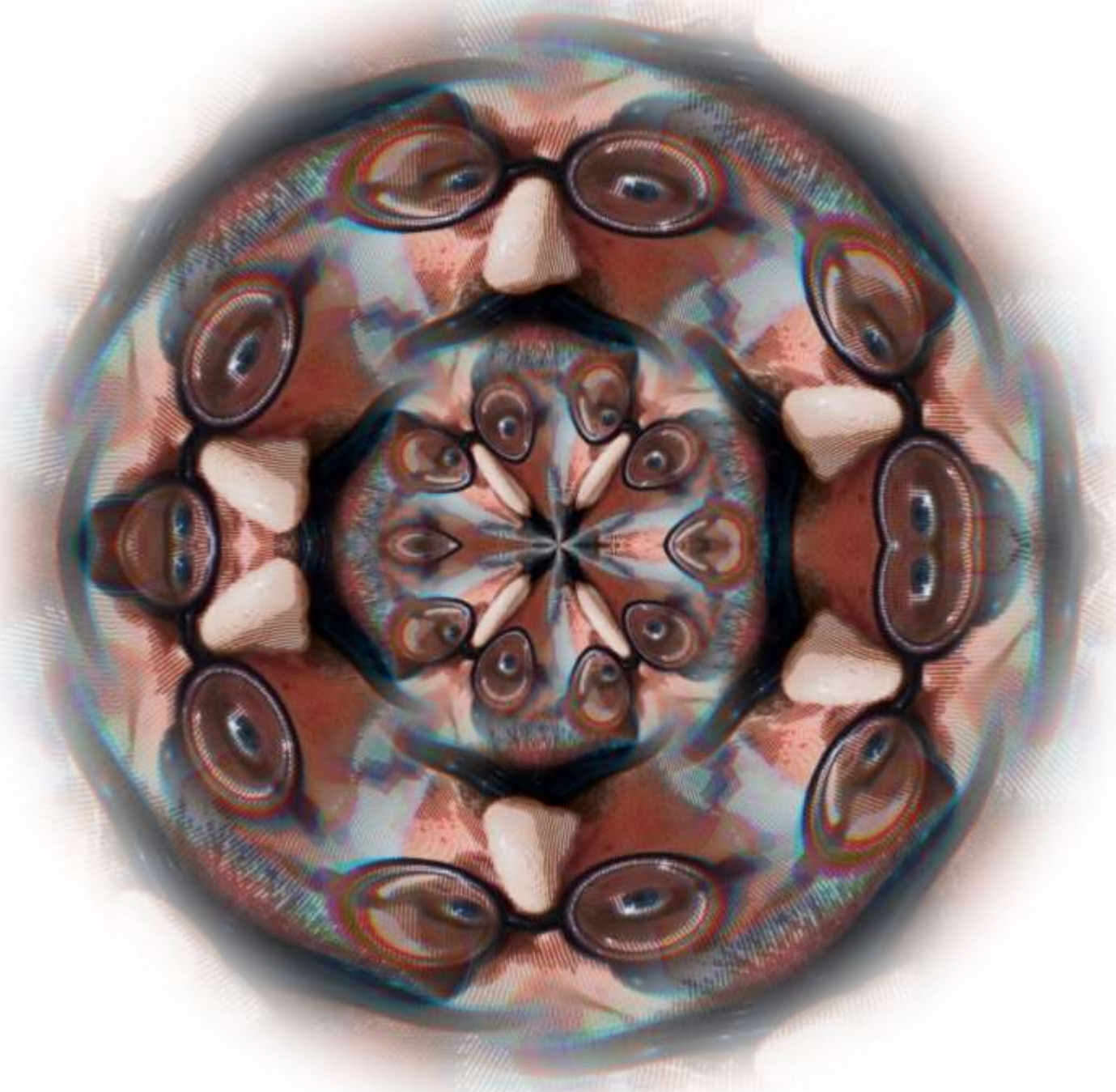
He was gonna drown. He saw it.

The knowledge sat in his gut, a lead weight. He was a young man, but the vision felt earned. He gripped the throttle tighter, the leather of his glove straining. The bike surged forward, eating the gray ribbon of road.

“Go pound sand,” he spoke into the wind, his words a dry, defiant rasp against the vastness of the failing economy and his own inherited chaos. “A man’s gotta ride.”

He wasn't running from the future. The bike wasn't an escape from the Depression; it was his declaration of war on it. It was the one thing he controlled. It was the fusion of it all: the dirt under his nails and the proud gleam of the chrome, the father of three and the lone wolf, the provider and the selfish son-of-a-gun. He was riding the knife-edge between the man he was supposed to be and the one he was afraid he truly was. This stretch of asphalt, between Bucksport and Eliot, was the only place that could hold both.

He leaned into a curve past Damariscotta, the smell of low tide and decaying fish guts filling his nostrils. He was going home to his family. But for now, on this machine that cost a fortune, he was exactly nowhere, and that was the only place he could ever be everything at once. The story of his life was written in the vibration of a 61-cubic-inch engine, a story of struggle and want and one beautiful, stupid, necessary extravagance. And he was just reading it out loud, one mile at a time.



GRID

By Hadrian Bushbalm

Mahjong and Chess are two sides of the same cracked coin. One is pure logic, a dance of predictable, perfect information. The other is a swirling vortex of chance and hidden tiles. The secret isn't to choose, but to fuse them, to create a bizarre, half-baked existence. I am not Voltaire, and my gums recede like a tide of regret. My ankles are a road map of scabs. Don't you love me, monkey mind? Here is the formula, a fever dream of a game where the rules of the universe shift in real time: $S_{b} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} (A_{t} + \epsilon_{i} \cdot (C_{g} + R_{m} + M_{c} + H_{p}))$ This isn't a game, it's a waking nightmare. The Foundation (A_t): The chessboard. A grid of 64 squares, black and white, a symbol of order. The pieces are the ancient rules of our existence: King, Queen, Rook, and Pawn. Your mission is to checkmate your opponent. This is the constant, the part of reality that refuses to crumble. The Chaos (ϵ_i): This is the chance variable, the random throw of the dice that changes everything. In the year 2000, you wield two umbrellas, averting rain and the splashes from racing traffic. This is a moment of pure Hyperbolic Gonzo (H_p). The man at the Dollar General gasped, then sat on a ladder to give consideration to Superman. This is the Random Mahjong (R_m) of a reality where things just... happen. The Fusion: This is where the world bleeds into a surreal mess. In this game, your chess pawn may suddenly become a Mahjong tile, with rules you don't understand, a symbol of Magic Chess (M_c). The move you've planned for ten turns is suddenly irrelevant. Zeitgeist has a troubling meaning. The knight is not a knight, but a three-legged dog. Your carefully constructed strategy turns to mush. It's a game where you must come to grips with wielding two umbrellas while racing traffic splashes your scabby ankles. The perfect information of the chessboard is a lie. The hidden information of Mahjong is the only truth. Most philosophers are problematic. The game is not a path to victory, but an endless cycle of adapting to a world that makes no sense. It's your funeral, Danny.

Gibb, Alice C., Miriam A. Ashley-Ross, and S. Tonia Hsieh. "Thrash, flip, or jump: the behavioral and functional continuum of terrestrial locomotion in teleost fishes." (2013): 295-306.

Kinney, Arthur F. "Continental Poetics." *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* (2004): 96-111.

Odoh, George C., Nneka S. Odoh, and Ekene A. Anikpe. "Waste and found objects as potent creative resources: A review of the Art is Everywhere project." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 6 (2014): 1-14.

Sharma, K. P., Shweta Sharma, and Subhasini Sharma. "Chemical sprays for controlling malodor and pathogens in household public toilets and urinals." *Indian J Environ Sci* 24 (2020): 71-74.